

## AODA Tipsheet #8

### Communicating with a member with a speech or language impairment

*This series provides tips for Ontario housing co-ops on communicating with members with disabilities. Using these tips will help your co-op adhere to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).*

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#### GENERAL TIPS

At the beginning of your interaction, find out how the person communicates and what you can do to make communication go smoothly. Many people with communication disabilities have written instructions that tell you what they want you to do.

Whenever possible, choose somewhere quiet to talk. That gives you both an opportunity to concentrate and not be distracted.

Listen attentively when you're talking to a person who has a speech or language impairment. Make eye contact.

Many people with Cerebral Palsy have slurred speech and involuntary body movements. Do not make assumptions or discount what they have to say, based on their appearance.

Be patient rather than attempting to speak for a person with speech difficulty. Give the person a chance to communicate, and time to answer or make a request. Impatience on your part may have a negative effect on the other person's speech.

Some people with speech and language impairments may be accompanied by a support person. Ensure you obtain your member's before discussing confidential matters in front of a support person.

#### COMMUNICATION TIPS

Speak in your regular tone of voice. Do not speak loudly or slowly. Most people with impaired speech and language can hear without difficulty.

Look directly at the person you are talking to - not at the person who may be accompanying him/her. Use first-person references; for example, say "Do *you* have any questions?" instead of "Does *she* have any questions?"

## COMMUNICATION TIPS

If a person has difficulty understanding what you are saying, use short, clear sentences and avoid using jargon. Ask the person what you can do to help him/her understand. For some people it is useful to write down key words as you speak, use gestures, point to objects and pictures or use drawings and diagrams. Ask questions more fully. Equally, resist the urge to complete sentences for him/her. If you don't understand an answer or question, simply ask the individual to repeat it or to write it down.

When necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or a shake of the head. Avoid oversimplification. If you ask a question, sometimes writing down a number of options can be a useful way for the individual to choose the answer they are looking for.

Sometimes asking basic yes-and-no questions can facilitate communication. Be sure to phrase such questions clearly and appropriately, avoiding use of confusing statements.

Recognize that a yes/no question approach has limitations. The member may become frustrated when wanting to answer

you may wish more information from the person than he/she can convey in a simple yes or no answer.

Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information or try another way of communicating such as with pen and paper or gestures. Repeat the part of the message that you understood, so that the speaker does not have to repeat his/her entire message.